

## **MRS Meeting - Eastern Counties**

Wilson Co DSS  
September 13, 2004

### **Attendees:**

State Staff: Tony Troop, Susan Moss, Gale Trevathyan, Gwen Byrns, Renee' Hannah, Heather Thomas,

Counties: Brunswick, Currituck, Duplin, Gates, Halifax, Harnett, Johnston, Lee, New Hanover, Pasquotank, Scotland, Wake, Warren, Wilson.

Non-State or County: Kara Allen-Eckard (NC State Family Support Conferencing Project)

### **Agenda:**

Announcements

October 52 County Meeting

November/December Meetings

Barriers to Family Assessment

### **Announcements – General Comments from Tony**

- Domestic Violence Policy
  - Went out to Directors last week.
  - Needs to be reformatted before it gets put on the web (hopefully later this week).
  - Will be effective 9/1 but counties will not implement until they get training.
  - No firm date for training yet, but hopefully mid-October.
- October 52 meeting
  - Will begin at 1:00 on 28<sup>th</sup> and go from 9-12 on 29<sup>th</sup>
  - Opening session with speakers including JoAnn, New Hanover Director
  - One afternoon breakout on Thursday the 28<sup>th</sup> with two breakouts Friday morning
  - If you have an idea for a breakout, let Tony know ASAP
  - Family Centered Meetings – NC State – will be largest breakout, everyone in attendance will be required to attend this. We have heard how important CFT meetings are to the success of services.
- November/December meeting
  - We need to have a meeting after the October, before the end of the year.
  - Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup> in Wilson
- January Meeting

- At the January meeting want to start all together and then breakout into workers and supervisors, so should be sure to bring some line workers
  - Learned from the 10 that workers have trouble getting the family assessment concept so thought it would help them to hear from their peers.
- Would like to make clear that anyone can attend any of the meetings, do not have to attend a particular one East or West.
- Question was raised concerning when the new Family Service Agreements will come out. Tony relayed from JoAnn that they should be out this week, the delay is due to revisions.
- Questions for later meetings:
  - Memorandum of Agreements – how are they done (example)
  - Who are counties using as facilitators?
  - What are agencies now calling staff (since they are not just 'investigators' or 'case managers')?
  - Counties should bring material to share, if they can send to Tony early he will make disks to distribute

### **Barriers to Family Assessments**

- Although there is not a required start date, the Division will be asking the General Assembly for funds for statewide MRS by January 2006. In order to do this we need to have all 52 doing it so that we can report on the benefits before asking.

### **Who has implemented, and if so, when, countywide, transferring cases?**

- Brunswick – 3/04
  - Countywide, keep case
- Currituck – 4/04
  - Countywide, keep case
- Duplin - No
- Gates – 3/04
  - All workers do Family Assessment, transfer case
- Halifax - No
- Harnett – 7/04
  - Countywide, transfer
- Johnston – 8/04
  - Countywide, transfer
- Lee – 7/04
  - Countywide, transfer
- New Hanover – 2/04
  - Countywide, keep case
  - Have a unique situation with the Work First workers who do assessments. If there is a report on a Work First family the Work First worker does the assessment and keeps the case

(unless it went to Foster Care or was Forensic, then it would be transferred.)

- Pasquotank - No
- Scotland - No
- Wake – 7/04
  - 2 of 6 zones implemented, transfer
- Warren - No
- Wilson – 7/04
  - Countywide with all workers except Forensic Assessment

### **Barriers Keeping Counties from Implementing**

- Duplin
  - Investigative unit reluctant, administrative issues
- Halifax
  - High turnover led to large caseloads which had to be reduced. With new money from General Assembly got new workers, but they have to be trained
- Pasquotank
  - Staffing shortages, trying to clear out backlog
- Scotland
  - Had a 50% vacancy rate, currently interviewing and laying groundwork for implementation
- Warren
  - Currently training new workers

### **General Comments from Implementation Discussion**

- Funding – some of the original counties think that funding is an issue, some don't. (Because they are spending more time on 210 which is capped TANF money and less on 215 – uncapped Z money.)
- However, even those that think funding is an issue agree that it is best for families and they will continue with the approach.
- No overall trend among the 10, but the Division still looking at funding issues
- The rate of substantiated cases is lower for those of the original 10 that have one worker keep the case.
- Can extend the 45 day time limit as long as there is documentation explaining why.
- Workers claim that Family Assessment takes longer than Forensic but according to the Data Warehouse data it actually averages out to fewer days! (Probably seems like more because of front loading.)
- County put forth the idea that you really lose a month when you transfer a case because the new worker has to get to know the family etc. and do a lot of things the first worker had already done. (Agrees with research from Minnesota and Missouri that showed greater case continuity when worker kept the case)

### **For those who have implemented, barriers to effectiveness?**

- Feel that doing both forensic investigations and family assessments is too much, becomes overwhelming for the social worker.
- Hard to do diligent effort on 215 and also initiative 210 in a timely manner.
- Hard to meet time limits (and stay family centered) set for family meetings because of suspicion and reluctance on the part of the family.
  - Make sure it goes from intake to SW quickly, and try to meet with family. However, if they drag their heels explain that it will happen, with or without the family together, usually they come around. (Acknowledge it is harder when they have no phone.)
- Turnover – how can you control for it?
  - Use former employees as part time or temps (this way you have qualified people, who have experience, need little or no training, and save \$ because they don't get benefits.)
  - Interns
  - Keep Staff from leaving – how?
    - Tony has heard that a large number of SW leave because they felt they were not getting supervisory support.
    - Pressures of CPS get to people – supervisors have to allow workers to vent, be their sounding boards
    - Supervisors should be a buffer for SW with administration
    - Help manage high case loads
- High Caseloads – large part of burnout – how can you combat problem?
  - Have protected time for workers and don't violate it
  - Supervisors take a case or two
  - Agency support for flex time
  - 1 day a week work at home
  - Take some folks out of rotation and staff cases more often to reduce backlog – not always “who's turn?” sometimes “who can handle...”
  - Team Staffing – done by Harnett, Lee, Wake, Wilson, Warren, Currituck, Scotland, Transylvania. Only 1 of 10 doesn't do it. They do it weekly and credit it with keeping caseloads low. (Also helps to reduce liability.)
- Lack of Buy-in within agency
  - New Hanover has a MRS committee made of people from all areas. Gives everyone a voice to vent and address issues.
  - Get outside trainers on family centered practice and attitudes
  - “Sell” MRS by focusing on the flexibility Family Assessment allows compared to Forensic
  - Redesign tools to be more useful to SW
  - Let 210 shadow 215 workers and vice versa (some of the expansion counties have shadowed the 10.)

### **Questions for next time:**

- What are agencies calling staff (old terms, investigators, case managers don't make sense anymore)?
- Counties should bring materials to share (or email Tony prior to and he will put on disks).
- Memorandum of Agreement – how is it done?
- Who is being used as facilitators